

# IACRA (Eye ACK' Rah) by Gregory French



Acronyms are the bane of any large organization, and the FAA is no exception. But, just maybe, this one is justified. Try saying “Integrated Airman Certification and/or Rating Application” five times fast. IACRA (eye ACK' rah), on the other hand, rolls off the tongue a bit more easily and, as airmen, we're all going to be saying it a lot more in the future.

What is IACRA? If you've ever applied for a certificate or rating, chances are pretty good that you did it using the good, old, United States Federal Aviation Administration Standard Form 8710. Love it or hate it, it's a pretty familiar document to most of us. While the 8710 has been around in one form or another for many decades, its time has come to rest in peace. That's where IACRA comes in.

IACRA is an Internet-based database program providing a fully electronic method of applying for an airman certificate or rating. If that sounds a bit officious, it is because that's the official definition. In reality, it's simply an Internet-based replacement for the old 8710, and it's a pretty good deal too once you get to know it. Many of you are already familiar with IACRA. Located on the Internet

at <http://iacra.faa.gov/iacra/>, it's been around in progressively improving form since October of 2003 when it was first released.

The IACRA program has come a long way since its first inception. At the time of its initial roll-out, it could only process the private pilot certificate application (referred to as a certificate/rating “Path”). Today, there are over 100 paths programmed, providing for over 80% of all possible application permutations. And the number of paths is growing weekly as the IACRA program team continues to develop the program's capabilities. Already the program can process virtually all pilot applications from sport pilot through airline transport pilot (ATP) type ratings, certificated flight instructors, mechanics, repairmen, Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 141 flight schools, and 14 CFR part 142 flight training centers. Plus it can handle most repairman applications (remember, repairmen are, by definition, airmen). In the works are some of the more arcane applications, such as part 141 hot-air balloon schools, control tower operators, parachute riggers, and others. Eventually, IACRA will be able to process

any airman application that either exists, or might exist, in the future. The current list of active paths can be found on the IACRA Web site under the selection “List of Paths” located about midway down the page.

Before we take a closer look at how IACRA works and how it can work better for you, let's first review the old paper 8710 process to see just what it is that IACRA is replacing and why it has become so necessary. Different certifications and ratings employ slightly different methods by which the paper 8710 applications are processed. In general, the applicant either hand-fills the 8710 paper form or, in more recent years, completes a digital computer-based form, then prints and physically signs it. Depending upon the type of certification or rating, a recommending instructor (RI) may or may not be required to review the paper copy and also sign it. The applicant will then, typically, take that application to a certifying official (CO) who will also review it, administer a test—if appropriate—and then sign it a final time.

Once signed by up to three individuals, the form is either submitted to the local Flight Standards District Of-



fice (FSDO), where it is reviewed and forwarded to the Airman Certification Branch in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, or it is submitted to Oklahoma directly by the CO via physical mail.

Upon receipt at the Airman Certification Branch, the application is carefully reviewed and, if complete and correct, the data are hand-entered into the airman certification database. If an error is noted in the application, the form is returned to the final signatory for correction and resubmission.

It should be obvious by now that there are several potential difficulties with this method of airman application processing. Many individuals must physically handle a paper product which can result in damaged and/or illegible forms. Forms may potentially be lost in the mail. Errors are frequently made in filling out the application that are not caught until they reach Oklahoma City. Processing times can be lengthy, in extreme cases up to several months. And this is to say nothing of the sheer volume of paper used. The bottom line here is that, in its current state, the 8710 process is complex, time consuming, labor-intensive, and error-prone.

See a problem here? Well, you're not the only one. Around the turn of the millennia the FAA started taking a hard look at how to improve the process. Plus, the FAA had been wrestling with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 for nearly five years already and saw this as a logical opportunity to comply with the requirements of that act—that is to reduce paperwork. In January 2003, development of the IACRA program commenced and the rest, as they say, is history.

Today we have a fully functional program that allows the applicant to apply for an airman certificate and/or rating without ever having to touch a piece of paper, from start to finish. The program is tied directly into the airman databases located at the Civil Aviation Registry in Oklahoma City, which allows for instantaneous data verification during the application process and instantaneously updates the databases upon airman certifica-

tion. For most applications, it's a triad: the applicant, the recommending instructor, and the certifying officer (most often a Designated Pilot Examiner, although others may play that role, such as an FAA Aviation Safety Inspector). All three parties must have access to the Internet and to the IACRA Web site.

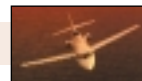
Let's take a look at a typical process. We'll use an initial private pilot application as an example. Let's say you, the reader, are the applicant. The first thing that you will do is go on line at <http://acra.faa.gov/iacra/> where you will register with the IACRA site. This will require the standard name, address, student pilot certificate number (if you have one already), and some other basic information. When you finish the basic registration process, you will be assigned an FAA Tracking Number (FTN) that you will keep forever. Keep the FTN secure, but keep it available. You'll need it throughout your flying career. Keep in mind that, even if you're not currently going for a new certificate or rating, you can get yourself registered on IACRA at any time. Just remember to hang on to that FTN once you get it. You can get the IACRA Help Desk folks to re-issue it to you, if you lose it, but you'll have to jump through some hoops. The good folks at the Help Desk are very concerned about your online security.

After you've registered, you can then log in as a user with your FTN and begin the process. It would take too long here to explain each step of the application, but you'll find it's really self explanatory once you get there. There will be six tabbed pages of requested information. Much of the initial information for tab-page one will already be auto-filled from the Oklahoma databases when you put in your FTN number. Complete each of the steps as required. When you complete each page of data, the tab for that page will show a green check mark to indicate that you've completed that stage of information. Note that there's a little bit of a trick here: in order for the program to confirm that you've properly completed a page

(and give you the green check mark) you'll have to click on the next page tab first. If that first page was not completed, or completed incorrectly, the little check box on the first tab will show a red "X" and you'll have to go back to correct whatever is missing or incorrect. Be aware that sometimes the pattern of expected response changes a bit from page to page, and certain responses may trigger new questions, so be sure to carefully read each line of each page, top to bottom, so that you won't miss an important instruction. Also note that sometimes some data input fields may be at the bottom of the page, below the screen edge and you'll have to scroll down to find them. Just in case of a problem, each page will have context-sensitive help available so you'll never get lost. And if worse comes to absolute worst, you can always call the Help Desk at 1-866-285-4942. Trust me; these guys live to help you with the program, and there's almost never any wait.

Once you've completed the first five tabbed pages of information, you'll be asked on the sixth page to review the application then submit it. That's about it for you as the applicant. With the exception of a signature later on, you're done with IACRA. The rest is up to the RI and CO. If you've pre-prepared by having all of your information laid out before you log in, the total time to input all the required data is less than 10 minutes.

From this point the RI takes over your application. He or she will log onto IACRA as an RI and call up your application based on your FTN. He/she will review the application for correctness and then electronically sign it (E-sign). If need be, the application can be partially reset to correct any errors before final signature. Unfortunately, if the RI has already signed the application, it's too late and you'll have to start over if you need to make any changes. The rationale behind this is that the RI is attesting to the veracity of the information that is on the application at the time that he/she signs it. If any changes were to be made after the signature, then the signature would be invalid. The take-



home lesson here is be SURE that the application is correct before you submit it. Changes made later on can be a pain!

The final step is for you to go take your practical test. Again, using your FTN your examiner will call up your application and review it for accuracy. Once you successfully complete the practical test (and we always assume success) you will be required to log on to E-sign the IACRA form in the presence of the examiner (or appropriate CO). The examiner will then log back in, E-sign the form, and print your temporary certificate on the spot.

It really is that easy. There will be variations on the theme depending on the type of certificate you're applying for, but, for those 100 plus paths already incorporated into the program, the process will be as straightforward as the Private Pilot described above.

Here are a few tips to help you out in your IACRA process.

- Start by downloading and reading the document: Getting Started Desktop Instructions, available as a .pdf file on the IACRA Web site. This small booklet will provide you with some of the basic information you'll need to get started, including definitions, help sources, and tips.

- Next, and this is probably the most important, make sure that you have all of your information in front of you before you log in. This means you have all of your certificates handy, and, if you are applying for a pilot certificate, you've already totaled your flight times for day, night, dual, solo, cross-country, and any others that might be appropriate for the certificate or rating that you're applying for.

- The program has a 30 minute inactivity logout. If you don't touch any keys for 30 minutes, it'll log you out. If you run out of time, or realize that you didn't get a piece of information pre-prepared, you can always save the application and log yourself out. You don't have to complete the entire application at one time. You'll be able to go back in and retrieve it later.

- If you happen to be an applicant for the private pilot certificate and you

hold a student pilot certificate, then when the question comes up asking you if you currently hold a certificate the answer will be "yes" since your student pilot certificate counts.

- Note that some of the program's reactions to your inputs may take a few moments. Just be patient. For example, when selecting a make and model of airplane, you might click on, for example, CE-172S, and apparently nothing will happen. Just wait a few moments for the program to process your selection and it'll pop up.

- There's been some concern that applicants are prohibited from using U.S. Government computers for their application process. That's true up to a point. No, you cannot use a government computer to fill out your application. However, if you are working with a government certifying officer, a safety inspector for example, and you're in a government office such as a FSDO, then it is acceptable to log on to their government computer to electronically E-sign the document under the ever-watchful eye of the CO.

- Finally, you'll want to be sure to use a high-speed Internet connection. Dial-up will work but it'll really be slow.

For those of you who still feel that IACRA remains somewhat of a mystery, there's hope on the electronic horizon. By the end of summer this year, there will be an online public-accessible training center for IACRA hosted by the FAA Safety Team (FAASafetyTeam) under the <<http://faasafety.gov/>> Web site (look for a fu-

ture link on the official IACRA Web site). This training site is currently under development and will host a number of different training aids that will include instruction documentation, PowerPoint™ presentations, and, best of all, a fully interactive practice IACRA program where you can play the role of applicant, designated examiner, recommending instructor, chief/assistant. chief flight instructor and more, even act as an aviation safety inspector. This fully interactive program will allow you to fill out practice applications, review them as an RI, and sign them off as a CO, all to help you get a better feel for the entire process.

The IACRA team continues to aggressively move the program forward, responding to user recommendations, making improvements, enhancing usability, and adding new paths. The FAA's goal is to see 80% or more of all applicants using the program within three years. Considering the speed, comprehensiveness, ease of use, and efficiency of the program, we'll likely see it overshadow the old FAA 8710 form long before that. So, in a world awash with acronyms, get used to another one: IACRA. It spells "doom" to the old 8710.



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**IACRA should not be confused with the old ACRA (or Airman Certification and/or Rating Application). ACRA was a stand-alone program for electronically generating and printing a temporary airman certificate on official paper. There was no network connection. The program must be installed on the computer to be used. For all practical purposes, the program is dead. Support for the program was officially cut off in August of 2005 and the FAA stopped producing the special water-marked paper for it. While Oklahoma City will still accept an ACRA-generated form, if it's on a left-over piece of official paper, when the (very limited) remaining supply runs out that'll be the final end of ACRA (note that IACRA can be printed on any ordinary printer paper).**

